

## Dereham Heritage Trust – Trustees’ Annual Report 2020

It is now two years since we changed our name from Dereham Antiquarian Society to Dereham Heritage Trust. “Heritage” is something to be enjoyed now, encouraging us to see how the past can serve the present. We recently reported about DHT’s activities to the Town Council’s Heritage and Open Spaces Committee, and told them that we want to “contribute to people’s experience of living and working in Dereham or visiting it, by investigating and presenting the history and archaeology of the town and its surroundings” so that people feel that Dereham is a good place to be.

It is also now a year since we became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, which has put us in a more secure position for things like contracts and trustee liability, and of course in the past year we have faced problems which have made us grateful for what security we can get!

### Appreciation of the past

Our most obvious contribution to the town in 2020 is not yet visible. It is the work on the research, drafting and design behind the Wayfinding panels which we expect to appear around the town later in 2021. Several committee members have contributed, but the great majority has been done by Sue Walker. We expect that this will have a lasting impact on people’s appreciation of the town, and will be a lasting public illustration of Sue’s talents. The panels are an initiative of aboutDereham, a forum of local community groups, on which our representative is Peter Wade-Martins.

Sue has also been heavily involved in preparations for Ellenor Fenn garden, which should appear in Wright’s Walk in 2021. This ties in with the work we are doing on Dereham places and people in the 1700s, for the 2021 Museum displays. Ellenor Fenn has been overshadowed by the work of her husband John in publishing the Paston Letters, but we hope that these initiatives will result in her being better known.

### Lockdown



*Online schooling began*

When lockdown began, most of us thought that it would only last a month or two, and we began collecting photos of lockdown in Dereham, so that it could be remembered in later years. As time has gone on it has become more and more part of daily life, but we hope that there will come a time when it is just a memory.

This time last year we were expecting repairs to the Museum, especially to protect against damp. These were delayed, and as the weeks went by it

became clear that the isolation rules would make it impracticable to open in 2020. Our volunteers have kept in touch, and we are busy planning for the 2021 season, although the opening is likely to be delayed, partly by Covid restrictions, to the start of June.



*Another record of lockdown for the Archive: work at Mid- Norfolk Food Bank's busy store at Rash's Green*

As lockdown got longer, we felt that we had to do more for our members, so in 2020 we produced seven newsletters instead of the normal four, and from September our monthly talks and discussions have gone online. Like many other organisations, we have been learning to do new things, and we hope that we are making fewer mistakes each month. Our speakers have been brave at learning new skills, and we owe them extra thanks. The extra Newsletters and the online meetings have meant more work for editor Ken Hawkins and the rest of the Committee, but we have been brave too!

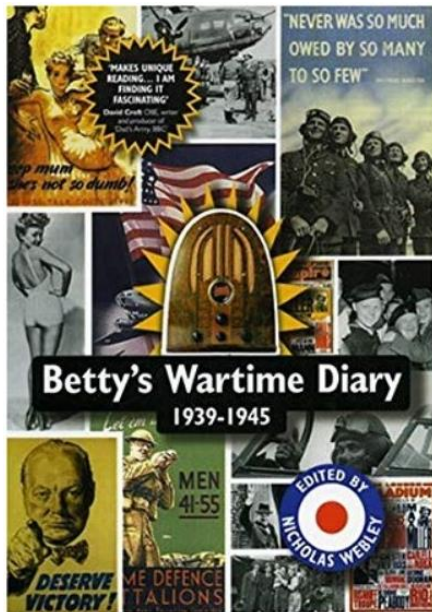
We know of eight members who do not have internet access, and things have been difficult for them, but we hope that at least they have enjoyed the extra Newsletters. However, some people have valued the flexibility of being able to choose when to view the talks, so we are thinking that when we go back to our face-to-face meetings we will also try to record them and put them online.

The online talks have meant more activity on our website <http://www.derehamhistory.com/>. This and our Facebook and Twitter presence are quietly managed by Sue Walker. Many people show an interest in these, but we do not have any other contact with them. If our online activities make them more interested in our town's heritage, that is good, and we hope that we may attract people into our other activities.

## **Archive and Museum**

Access to the Archive also ceased when the Town Council had to close the Assembly Rooms, and we have had to postpone the revision of the Modes catalogue, which was being carried out by Heather Ryder and Sue Marsh. However, people continue to donate things which we feel it is in the interests of the town for us to keep, and for the moment they are accumulating in committee members' houses. Some of these have been connected with Hobbies, and have included old copies of Hobbies magazine.





*We were given this book. We believe that the author worked in a Toftwood pub*

The steady stream of acquisitions means that we need more storage space. There is quite a lot of material in the Assembly Rooms which could be kept somewhere else that is not heated to the standard of office accommodation, but still meets the requirements of our accreditation. Also, when the Archive moved from Rash's Green we were compelled to find temporary storage for a couple of big items: the original of the Town Sign, and the trailer which was used to take a Hobbies display round to exhibitions. Peter Wade-Martins gave them accommodation for the time being, but we need to make more permanent arrangements. We are seeking the help of the Town Council with this problem, but there is no obvious answer so far.

It is unclear when we will be able to open the Museum in 2021, because of Covid-19 and the ongoing work on the building. As announced in the Newsletter, we are planning new displays on John

and Ellenor Fenn and the work on the Paston Letters. Also, our accreditation is due for renewal in 2023, so we must keep up our work on that.

## Museum building

We recorded in the Newsletter our concern at the treatment of the pargeting on Bishop Bonner's cottage by contractors, and our dispute with Town Council representatives over this. A pargeting consultant we commissioned reported that the treatment was not up to conservation standards. This contributed to delays and the work was not completed before winter. At the time of writing (28 February) we remain unsure what the plans are, and we are concerned that the consultant we identified has not yet been invited to tender for involvement in the necessary restoration. It is essential that we work with the Council for the good of the town, but we have a duty to do what we can to ensure that the town's heritage is properly looked after.

This is not all bad news, however. The work included internal and external work to deal with effects of damp, including the provision of a gully along the north side, to divert rainwater. We are also grateful for support from



*Work in progress on the pargeting*



*The new gully at the end of the Museum*

Pat Skittrall, and (in January) Martial Rose. Tony was chair and Pat was treasurer, and both contributed in many ways over the years.

We have been grateful for the annual grant from the Town Council, which helps pay for the Museum and Archive, but of course our income went down substantially due to loss of Museum and monthly meeting admission income. However, we were glad to get a Small Business Grant from the government, which should enable us to make investment that would not otherwise have been possible, and to prepare for the future. Finance continues to be looked after very ably by Ken Hawkins, and the accounts are presented separately.

Trevor Ogden, OBE

Chair, for the Trustees: Robena Brown, Catherine Hawkins, Ken Hawkins

3 March 2021

councillors, and the continuing support from Phillip Duigan, chair of the Town Council's Heritage and Open Spaces Committee.

### **Membership and finance**

Our membership has gone up a little this year, and now stands at 65. We were however sorry to hear of the deaths of longstanding members, including Tony Jones,